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Statement submitted by ABAAD Resource Center for Gender Equality, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

ABAAD is a nongovernmental organization that aims to achieve gender equality as an essential condition for sustainable peace, democracy, and social and economic development in the Middle East and North Africa region. Since its establishment more than a decade ago, ABAAD has sought to fulfill its vision of a world void of violence and discrimination – a world where all individuals live in freedom, dignity, and peace, and where women can fully realize their potential, exert their agency, effectively participate in democratic processes affecting their lives and well-being, and access all available resources.

However, the prevailing situation in Lebanon presents significant challenges to accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the advancement of women and girls. These challenges stem from socio-economic instabilities rooted in decades of corruption, discrimination, and mismanagement of the country's resources. Furthermore, Lebanon's political landscape is characterized by longstanding polarization, sectarianism, ineffective governance, and a biased power-sharing system that limits the involvement of women and allocates key leadership positions among confessions and political elites without regard for qualifications or social justice, thus revealing the country's failure to embrace its responsibility toward safeguarding women.

Additionally, the country grapples with the aftermath of the economic crisis that began in 2019, the devastating explosion at the Beirut port in 2020, the substantial influx of over two million Syrian refugees into Lebanon, and the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. These conditions have all taken a severe toll on both Lebanese citizens and refugees, exacerbating existing disparities and vulnerabilities, particularly those affecting women and girls, and disturbingly, leading to an alarming increase in violence against women. Furthermore, the failure to elect a president and establish a functional government has further exacerbated the country's political, social, and economic crises, intensifying the challenges faced in pursuing gender equality.

Lebanon's political, social, and economic crises have led to widespread poverty, collapse in public service, and community tensions. This dire situation has been further aggravated by a global food and fuel crisis, leaving approximately four million people urgently in need of humanitarian assistance, including 1.5 million displaced Syrians and 2.2 million vulnerable Lebanese individuals. According to a 2023 report by the European Commission, an alarming 80 per cent of the Lebanese population lives in poverty, with 36 per cent falling below the extreme poverty line. Additionally, an overwhelming 90 per cent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, particularly those residing in informal settlements and collective shelters, endure deplorable and substandard living conditions and cannot meet their basic needs.

The deteriorating economic conditions, local currency devaluation, limited employment opportunities, deep-rooted societal biases, economic disparities, and legal inequalities have hit women and girls the hardest and exacerbated their economic vulnerability. Consequently, women and girls face restricted access to proper education and healthcare services, increased risk of violence and exploitation, and limited decision-making power even within their households. These challenges form a poverty cycle that perpetuates socio-economic hardships that impact current and future generations.

Addressing these issues and breaking this vicious poverty cycle requires collaborative efforts between the local and international stakeholders with a focus on promoting women's rights, introducing educational reforms, social support programs, legal changes, and societal shifts while strengthening institutions and enhancing

access to public services to facilitate women and girls' full participation and agency in society.

Recommendations

Tailoring interventions and strategies that fit Lebanon's unique challenges while considering the specific needs of women and girls in various communities, the refugee crisis, and economic instability can accelerate progress toward gender equality, and foster a more inclusive and prosperous society.

We urge the main stakeholders and the Government of Lebanon to undertake the following actions:

- **International Human Rights Commitments:** Implement all international human rights treaties and instruments, notably the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Remove reservations on critical articles, including 9 (2), 16 (1) (c), (d), (f), (g), and 29 (1).
- **Evidence-Based Research:** Conduct evidence-based studies to meticulously analyze gender inequalities, injustices, discrimination, poverty, and their root causes, fostering a nuanced understanding of the imminent challenges.
- **Gender-Responsive Policies:** Utilize evidence-based data and research to collaborate with key stakeholders, activists, and policymakers and consequently develop gender-responsive policies, laws, plans, and budgets to address the specific needs of women and girls.
- **Capacity Building Initiatives:** Promote a gender-responsive system by conducting training programs for public institutions, ministries, justice, and law enforcement officials, providing them with a profound understanding of gender equality and women's rights.
- **Unified Comprehensive Framework:** Endorse a comprehensive gender equality framework, ensuring a standardized, coordinated approach for delivering consistent women-focused public services tailored to the unique needs of women and girls.
- **Institutional Stability:** Implement the constitution without gender-based discrimination and all the necessary measures to ensure the sound flow of the public institutions, including electing a new president and appointing a cabinet to confront the current critical challenges.
- **Gender-Responsive Budgeting:** Advocate for a national gender-responsive budget that prioritizes sectors like healthcare and education, ensuring that allocated resources reach women and girls.
- **Educational Reform and Awareness:** Lobby for adopting and implementing gender-sensitive educational curricula and launching awareness campaigns challenging prevailing gender norms and supporting women's rights and gender equality.
- **Political Participation:** Facilitate women's active participation in political and decision-making leadership roles at the local, regional, and national levels.
- **Economic Disparities:** Address and rectify gender disparities in the economic domain by endorsing laws and policies that promote equal opportunities, wages, and working conditions.
- **Women's Rights Laws:** Endorse, implement, and enforce effective laws and policies protecting women's rights and combatting violence against women.

- **Enhancing Capacities of Refugee Women:** Launch tailored initiatives focusing on the development of refugee women through education, vocational training, and psychosocial support.
- **Combating Gender-Based Violence:** Adopt a zero-tolerance policy toward gender-based violence and establish support services, shelters, and legal mechanisms to support and protect survivors.
- **Financial Institutions Collaboration:** Collaborate with national and international financial institutions to provide easy and tailored loans for women entrepreneurs, supporting them in initiating and scaling up their businesses.
- **Promote Entrepreneurship:** Design and launch women-focused programs and initiatives that promote entrepreneurship and innovation, ensuring that women can access resources and the market.
- **Microfinance and Training:** Design and implement tailored microfinance programs and vocational training for women and girls, providing them with the necessary skills and resources to foster their economic independence and agency.

International stakeholders have a vital role in supporting Lebanon in its efforts to promote gender equality. They can accelerate progress and foster a more inclusive society through the following means:

- **Technical Assistance:** Provide Lebanon with technical assistance, knowledge sharing, and expert advice to enhance and scale up local gender-focused initiatives.
- **Direct Funding:** Allocate international aid and funds directly to initiatives and projects aiming at supporting women and girls, prioritizing grassroots organizations such as ABAAD that have a proven track record and are deeply rooted within the community.
- **Economic Advancement:** Foster economic advancement for women by providing funding, mentorship, and market access to women entrepreneurs and businesswomen, ensuring that they can tap into global markets and compete at the international level.

Achieving gender equality and advancing the rights of women and girls are not just lofty goals; they are a global imperative necessary for fostering a fair, inclusive, and prosperous society. The path toward realizing these goals aligns with international frameworks such as the Commission on the Status of Women and the Sustainable Development Goals. Ensuring success necessitates multi-stakeholder partnerships between civil society organizations, governmental bodies, international agencies, the private sector, and the community. Engaging men as allies, promoting a rights-based approach, and recognizing the intersectionality of gender are essential to ensure inclusivity, comprehensiveness, and the effectiveness of interventions.
